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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003036

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PMIL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT NINEWA: A RISE IN ARAB-KURD RHETORIC

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Classified By: Acting Ninewa PRT Leader Mark Schapiro for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) cable.

12. (U) Summary. A recent increase in public rhetoric and posturing between al-Hadba Gathering (AHG) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) officials in Ninewa Province has raised political tensions to a level not seen since the April 2009 KDP-backed Ninewa Fraternity List (NFL) walkout of the Ninewa Provincial Council (PC). Exacerbated by the defection of an NFL member back to the PC, and the recently released Human Rights Watch report which criticized KDP actions in KRG-controlled areas of Ninewa, neither side of the debate appears ready to temper their public statements anytime soon.

While a rise in rhetoric is to be expected in an election year, it more likely reflects a heightening of tensions and quite possibly provides fertile ground for continued terrorist attacks. End Summary.

Mr. Pessou's Defection

13. (C) In late October 2009, NFL-aligned PC member Hajji Hassan Pessou, a self-described Yezidi-Kurd from Sinjar District, announced his break with the NFL and his return to full participation in the PC. Celebrated by AHG members, PC Vice-Chairman Dildar Zebari publicly praised Pessou and encouraged other NFL members to follow suit. Within a week, however, Pessou reported that he and his family had received threats from men working for the KDP-aligned Sinjar mayor who sent the men on orders from the Sinjar KDP Chairman. Pessou told us that while traveling home on November 4 from Mosul to Qahtaniya, Sinjar, with an Iraqi Police (IP) escort, Iraqi Army (IA) soldiers stopped him at a checkpoint outside of Tal Afar. Pessou said they warned him that he would be in danger from the Peshmerga if he traveled further. At the same checkpoint, the IP unit escorting him refused to continue. Zebari, along with Ninewa Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi, raised the issue with U.S. civilian and military officials, requesting a U.S. military escort for Pessou. Nujaifi and Zebari took to the airwaves, publicly condemning the denial of safe passage and the threats to Pessou by the Sinjar mayor and KDP Chief. (Note: PRT and USF have both explained to Nujaifi and Zebari that Pessou's freedom of movement must be guaranteed by Iraqi Security Forces, and USF have made this point in meetings with KRG officials. End note.)

The KDP Raises the Stakes

14. (C) Separately, in the first tangible action since the start of the boycott to demonstrate &two Ninewas,8 Ninewa KDP Chief Keshro Goran recently began to speak to U.S. officials and NGOs of opening an office in the town of Bashiga that he alternates between describing as a &shadow provincial council8 and a &government services office,8 designed to &coordinate8 essential services for those parts

of Ninewa under KDP control. While inflammatory enough, the choice of location is even more provocative, as Bashiqa (in Mosul district) is the town where Governor Nujaifi was denied passage by Peshmerga forces when traveling to a balloon festival in May 2009.

Zebari Strikes(Goran Counters

¶5. (U) In the meantime, Zebari took to the airwaves on November 8 to announce that unless boycotting NFL members returned to the PC, the PC would start procedures to remove them under Article 6 of the Provincial Powers Law. While within the power of the PC, Zebari made the announcement prior to consulting the other members of the PC. One member told us that Zebari lacked the votes to actually remove the members. In meeting with the PRT, PC Chair Jaber Muhammad Qmembers. In meeting with the PRT, PC Chair Jaber Muhammad Abdullah said that although the PC had taken the first steps to remove the NFL members, he did not think it would come to a final vote for at least two more months. He also said that he expected three or four members of the NFL to follow Pessó back to the PC. In response to the PC's actions, Goran announced through the press that the NFL would ask the Iraqi Council of Representatives to dissolve the Ninewa PC.

Governor Nujaifi Fuels the Fire

¶6. (U) Following his announcements admonishing Sinjar,s mayor and the KDP Chief for threatening Pessó, Governor Nujaifi publicly called upon the PC on November 11 to remove the legal protection of Sinjar,s mayor and called on him to present himself to the PC. Nujaifi stated that if the mayor failed to present himself, he was authorized to remove the mayor from his position. At the same news conference, Nujaifi announced that the &violations8 against minorities

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reported in the Human Rights Watch report took place in regions of Ninewa under the protection of Kurdish Security Forces (KSF). Accordingly, the Governor called upon Baghdad to deploy its forces throughout the province to remove the KSF, enforce the rule of law, and protect all the citizens of the province.

Comment

¶7. (C) Although a rise in rhetoric may represent election year politics as usual, the growing political drama suggests that the possibility of political reconciliation is growing increasingly unlikely without considerable external pressure.

The rhetoric also lends credence to the notion that Ninewa,s Arab-Kurd divide is actually a political AHG-KDP divide, not an organic manifestation of ethnic divisions. Regardless, with U.S. and Iraqi Army reporting suggesting that terrorists may refocus their efforts on Ninewa during the election season, such worsening rhetoric only serves to embolden those who continue to exploit the political divide in Ninewa.

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